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No. 20  
THE ORIGIN AND CULT OF  
TĀRĀ

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JHĀNANANDA SHASTRI



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HIRANANDA SHASTRI, M.A., M.O.L.



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## THE ORIGIN AND CULT OF TARĀ.

**Introductory remarks.**—While noticing a few sculptures which were added to the Provincial Museum at Lucknow when I was in charge of that Institution, in an article of mine that has appeared as memoir No. XI of the Archaeological Survey Department, I incidentally made some observations regarding the question of the origin of Tārā, the well-known goddess in the Buddhist and Hindu mythologies. Those observations led me to develop the question further and the results of my further studies are embodied in this paper. My chief object is to find out whether Tārā had a Buddhist or Brahmanical origin, whether her cult arose in India or elsewhere, and what was her chief function originally. In connexion with these problems the *dhyānas* of the chief *bhedas* or varieties of the goddess mentioned in Buddhist texts have been given at the end of the memoir in the form of an appendix.

Let us see first of all how Tārā is represented in Hindu or Brahmanical mythology.

**Tārā in Brahmanical mythology.**—Brahmanical mythology knows of several Tārās, but here we are concerned with the goddess of this name who is known as the second Mahāvidyā and is sometimes called *Dvītiyā* or the Second; Kālī being known as *Adyā* or the First. Her *dhyāna* is given in several *tantra* works as will be noticed below. Her chief forms are three, namely, Ekajāṭā, Nilasarasvatī and Ugrā, although several others are mentioned under various names. These designations do not mean distinct divinities. On the contrary, they indicate only the particular aspects of the deity which the votary has in view, the *devatā* being one and the same throughout. This is the case not only with Tārā but with other gods and goddesses as well, whether they be old or new, a fact which was recognised long ago by Yāska, the well-known etymologist of ancient India who in his comments on the *Nighaṇṭu* or the *Nirukta*<sup>1</sup> said :—

‘प्रत्यच्छेदस्यैतद्वति माहाभाग्याद्वताया एक आत्मा बहुधा स्तूयते’

‘We see actually that because of the greatness of a *devatā* or deity the one principle of life, i.e. the deity, is praised in different ways.’ This oneness of a *devatā*

<sup>1</sup> Chap. VII, pada I, *Khaṇḍa* 5.



is recognised by the *Tantras* also. For instance, the *Tārātantra*, while speaking of the *bhedas* or various forms of Tārā, clearly says<sup>1</sup> that the great goddess is but one and she is threefold in name only. एकैव हि महादेवी नाममात्रं त्रिधा भवेत्. But in the present case this oneness or *ekatva*, it seems to me, indicates rather the absorption of several originally diverse but similar cults into the one cult of Tārā—the cult of Tārā being so popular that it absorbed other cults of like nature with the result that the divinities of those cults merged into Tārā and their appellations became synonyms of her name. That a *chela* or disciple is asked to worship a particular form and not the principal divinity and is initiated into the *mantra* and the mode of worship of that particular form alone, even in these days, tends to support this view. In some cases there may be supersession, as, for instance, in the case of the Vedic gods Varuṇa and Indra, which is evidenced by the *Rigveda*<sup>2</sup> itself. The early Indo-Aryans, who in their advances became more and more warlike and wanted a warlike god to worship came increasingly to prefer Indra to Varuṇa, as the latter was rather a moral god busy in watching the sins of the people through his spies, the *spāśas*, whereas the former was so intent on killing his foes in the battle-field that in consequence he became the national hero, while poor Varuṇa, assuming a minor position, had to content himself with his abode in the waters! Another instance of the absorption of cults is shown by the case of Śiva, whose cult has now practically absorbed all the minor cults with their godlings, the *bhūtas*, the *pretas*, the gods and goddesses of sickness or disease, who were enrolled as the host or *gaṇas* of Śiva, Śiva himself taking the title of *Bhūtanātha* or *Bhūtapati*. The worship of the chief divinity or the principal form would propitiate all the rest, as the chief divinity represents them all. The *bhedas* or different forms are differentiated in order that a worshipper may keep one form in view for meditation or worship.

To advert to our deity Tārā. The appellation of *Ekajātā* is given because of her one chignon. She is called *Nilā* or *Nilasarasvatī* because of her blue colour and her being an embodiment of wisdom. She is fierce, or she saves from dire calamity, and is consequently known as *Ugrā* 'उग्रपत्तारिणी यस्मात्'. Taking the various representations or *dhyānas* of Tārā as found in works like *Tārārahasya*, *Tārātantra*, *Tantrasāra*, *Mantramahodadhī* and others, I find that she is primarily a saviouress, either riding a corpse lying on a lotus, or standing in the attitude of an archer (the *pratyāldha* pose), is generally of blue colour, bears *Akshobhya* in her head-dress, and holds a lotus in her hand besides various ornaments and emblems.

**References in Brahmanical literature.**—In the praise or *stuti* of the goddess *Durgā* by *Yudhisṭhira*, the eldest *Pāṇḍava*, which occurs in the great epic, the *Mahābhārata*, we find that the goddess is extolled by the name of *Tārīṇī*. *Tārā* and *Tārīṇī* are identical terms both signifying 'तारयन्त्या'<sup>3</sup> 'saviour', i.e., the goddess who enables one to swim across the waters of tribula-

<sup>1</sup> *Patala* 5; st. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Hymns 82 and 83 of the VII Book.

<sup>3</sup> *Bhānuji Dikshit* on the *Amarakosha* under *Tārā*, i. 21.

tion. Besides this name, we find several appellations in this eulogy which seem to indicate distinct divinities, e.g., *Kālī*, *Chandī* or *Sarasvatī*. Apparently then, *Tārīṇī* also designates a distinct divinity. But when we remember that the traits mentioned in this *stotra* are not uncommon to other divinities, we are constrained to wonder whether Tārā as conceived in later *Tāntrika* works, i.e., as the second *Mahāvidyā*, was at all in the view of the composer of this eulogy. *Durgā*, the *devatā* of this hymn, as we find her described in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa*, which is one of the chief books of the *Śāktas*, is the female principle in the universe. She is the embodiment of the *tejas* or energy of the gods, the other goddesses being regarded as her forms or *rūpas* :—

“ . . . देवानां शक्रादीनां शरीरतः ।

निर्गतं समहत्तेजस्तत्त्वेकं समगच्छत ।

ततस्तस्मिन् देवानां तेजोराशिस्तद्भवाम् . . . ”

Ch. 82-10-18.

This might be an attempt towards monotheism but I doubt very much if the highly developed cult of the ten *mahāvidyās* was at all known to the author of this *Purāṇa*, far less to the author of the above-mentioned eulogy in the great epic. In the *tantra* works I find these *vidyās* or 'muses' to be ten whereas in this *Purāṇa* the *Mahāvidyā* is only one as is clear from the following verses :—

‘ महाविद्या महामाया महामेधा महाकृतिः ॥

महामोहा च भवति महादेवी महासुरो ।

महारात्रि ! महाविद्ये ! नारायणि ! नमोस्तुते ॥ ’

Chap. 81, st. 5  
Chap. 91, st. 20.

Such verses go to prove that this cult was not known to the author of the *Purāṇa*. The cult of the *mātrīs* or divine mothers is no doubt very old and was evidently known to him as well as to the author of the *Mahābhārata*. This is clear from the fact that the *mātrīs* themselves are mentioned in the epic and in the *Purāṇas*. The divine mothers are named not only in the *Kośas* but in the ancient Hindu literature as well. The antiquity of their cult is also evidenced by inscriptions. The *Kadamba* dynasty<sup>1</sup> and the *Chālukya*<sup>2</sup> kings worshipped the seven mothers, and a large temple was built for them during the reign of *Viśavarma*,<sup>3</sup> the king of *Malwa*, in the year 480 (423-424 A.D.). They formed a not unfamiliar theme of sculpture, for, we see them represented in different parts of India. The *Gupta* emperors, for instance *Kumāra-Gupta* and *Skanda-Gupta*, had their images set up for worship.<sup>4</sup> Two of their representations<sup>5</sup> are reproduced below in plate II where they are marked

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. VI, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. VII, p. 162; Vol. XVIII, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> *Fleet, Gupta Inscriptions*, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Plate LXXII in the *Cave Temples of India* (Fergusson and Burgess) and plate XXXIV in the *Ellora Cave Temples* (Burgess) represent two other panels of the *mātrīs* in the Caves.



(a) and (b). One is early and the other late mediæval. But it is very doubtful if the Tārīnī of the *Mahābhārata* is identical with the Tārā of the *Tantras*. It is true that the *Tantras* also make Tārā one of the forms of *Pārvatī* or the divine *śakti*, but that is only an attempt towards the *Vedāntic* notion which we find fully developed in expressions like 'सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म'. This is clear from verses like the following which we find in the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* :—

4th *Uuāsa*, sts.  
8th, 12-14.

इति देव्या वचः श्रुत्वा देवदेवो महेश्वरः ।

उवाच परया प्रीत्या पार्वतीं पार्वतोपनिः ॥

त्वमाद्या सर्वविद्यानामस्माकमपि जन्मभूः ।

त्वं जानासि जगत्सर्वं न त्वां जानाति कश्चन ॥

त्वं कालो तारिणो दुर्गा षोडशो भुवनेश्वरो ।

ध्रुमावती त्वं बगला भैरवो किन्नमस्तका ॥

त्वमन्नपूर्णा वाग्देवी त्वं देवो कमलालया ।

सर्वशक्तिस्वरूपा त्वं सर्वदेवमयोतनुः ॥

"The great Lord, the god of gods and lord of *Pārvatī*, on hearing these words thus addressed *Pārvatī* with great affection.....You are the origin of all the sciences, you are the origin of us all as well. You know the universe but none comprehends you. You are *Kālī*, you are *Tārīnī*, *Durgā*, *Shoḍaśī*, *Bhuvaneśvarī*, *Dhūmāvatī*, *Bagalā*, *Bhairavī*, and *Chhinnamastakā*. You are *Annapūrpā* and the goddess of speech and you are *Lakshmī* (who resides in the lotus). You are the embodiment of all energy and your body is made up of all the gods."

Here the cult of the *Mahāvidyās* is fully developed and evidently this *tantra* is posterior to the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa* and *a fortiori* to the *Mahābhārata* eulogy of the goddess *Durgā*, alluded to above. The fact of the *stotra* being vague as compared to the description in this *tantra* shows the former to be earlier. Still I do not think there can be any great difference in age or that the '*stuti*' is so old as I first thought it to be. "Mr. Utgikar" as has been pointed out by Prof. M. Winternitz,<sup>1</sup> "has found that the best manuscripts of the *Virāṭaparvan* do not contain the *Durgāstotra* at all." Consequently it has to be treated as a later addition.

Attempts towards monotheism we find in some of the oldest Brahmanical works, for instance, in the *Rig-veda*<sup>2</sup> itself, as in the verse—

इन्द्रं मित्रं वरुणमग्निमाहु रथो दिव्यः स सुपर्णो गरुत्मान् ।

एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्त्यग्निं यमं मातरिश्वानमाहुः ॥

which is so often quoted. Still, I think, the fact that the personality of the divinity is highly developed and quite distinct in the *Tantra* while not so in

<sup>1</sup> J. R. A. S. B. B. No. LXXV, Vol. XXVI, (1922-23), p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> I. 164. 46.

the *sotra* makes the difference in their age self-evident. If we compare the *Prakṛitikhanda* of the *Brahmavaivarta-Purāṇa* and the *Durgā-saptasatī* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa*, both giving the episode of king *Suratha* and the merchant *Samādhi*, we shall at once find that the goddess *Durgā*, the visible personification of the active principle, is not so distinct in the one as she is in the other, for, in the former the *Sāṅkhya* view of the *Purusha* and the *Prakṛiti* is not yet materialized. A comparison of the earlier and the later Brahmanical literature shows how gradual the personification or materialization of the *Prakṛiti* or the active principle had been. In the earlier works, like the *Sāṅkhāyana-Gṛihyasūtra*, we do find, for example, a goddess *Bhadrakālī*, but how different she is from the *Ādyā* or *Kālī* of the *Mahāvidyā* cult of the *Tantras*! Similarly, the *Umā-Haimavatī* of the *Talavakāra* or *Kenopanishad* is not identical with the *Umā* of the *Kumāra-sambhava* of *Kālidāsa* or that of the *Purāṇas*. Going to still earlier sources, we find how dissimilar is the 'Divine *Vāc*' or *Logos* personified in the *Vāgāmbhṛiṇīya-sūkta* of the *Rig-veda* from the *Sarasvatī* of the later ages. While recognizing, therefore, that the worship of the female principle or energizing activity, *i.e.* *Śakti*, was known to even the Vedic Aryans to say nothing of the authors of later works, I find that there seems to be no trace of the highly developed *Śakti*-worship of the *Tantras* in the *Purāṇas* and the books which came into existence before the third or fourth century A.D. This 'silence' can hardly be explained or accounted for unless we admit that the cult was unknown to that period. To say that this pertains to the '*Vāma-mārga*' and the lower-class people whereas these books were written by those who followed the *dakṣiṇa-mārga* will not hold good, for the *Purāṇas* themselves treat of the *tāntric* practices without any reservation. But for this one could hardly expect such sayings as 'गर्ज गर्ज क्षणं मूढ मधु यावत् पिबाम्यहम्' attributed in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa* to the goddess *Durgā* herself. The only reasonable explanation seems to be that the development was gradual. That it has been so we find not only from the *Purāṇas* but from other works as well. I have just alluded to the differences we notice in the personality of the *Durgā* of the two *Purāṇas*, namely, the *Brahmavaivarta* and the *Mārkaṇḍeya* and the *Tantras* or other works. The same is the case with other deities. Some were superseded while others became more and more popular and consequently their personalities as well as their cults were much more developed.

The *tāntrika* cult of the *Mahāvidyās* does not appear to be very old. I am not aware that it is known to the eighteen principal *Purāṇas*. The *Brahmāṇḍa-Purāṇa* in its *Lalitopākhyāna* not only alludes to but fully describes the goddess *Tārā* as a distinct divinity,

'तारा नाम महाशक्तिः'

but she is not the *Mahāvidyā*. In the description, it gives, she is called *Tārāmbā*, or 'Tārā the mother' like her Mongolian name '*Dara-ke*' and is represented as the chief of the countless *śaktis* or *nāvikis* (boat-women) con-



trolling the navigation in 'the lake of nectar' or 'Amṛitavāpi' who can suppress the flooded waters:

*Ibid.* st. 17.

तासां नौकावाहिकानां शक्तोनां श्यामलत्वेषाम् ।

प्रधानभूता तारांवा जलौघशमनक्षमा ॥

"Tārā, the mother, who can control the rush of waters, is the chief of those *śaktis* who navigate or guide the boats and have dark complexion." This Tārā though not yet the second Mahāvidyā of the *tantras* is, I think, her prototype. As this is a highly interesting reference with very strong bearing on my thesis, I quote the text containing the description of the deity and give a rendering thereof:—

मनोनाम महाशालः ... ..  
तन्मध्यकक्ष्याभागस्तु सर्वाप्यमृतवापिका ।  
न तत्र गन्तुं मार्गोऽस्ति नौकावाहनमन्तरा ॥  
तारानाम महाशक्तिर्वर्तते तोरणेश्वरी ।  
बह्वस्तनोत्पलश्यामास्तारायाः परिचारिकाः ॥  
रत्ननौकासहस्रेण खेलन्त्यस्सरसीजले ।  
अपरं पारमायान्ति पुनर्यान्ति परं तटम् ॥  
कोटिशस्तत्र ताराया नाविक्यो नवयौवनाः ।  
सुहृर्गयन्ति नृत्यन्ति देव्याः पुण्यतमं यशः ॥  
परिचरणयः काञ्चिकाश्चिच्छूगः स्वपाणयः ।  
पिबन्त्यस्तक्षुधातोयं संचरन्त्यस्तरोशतेः ॥  
तासां नौकावाहिकानां शक्तोनां श्यामलत्वेषाम् ।  
प्रधानभूता तारांवा जलौघशमनक्षमा ॥  
आज्ञां विना तयोस्तारा मन्त्रिणोदण्डनाथयोः ।  
चिनेत्रस्यापि नोदते वापिकाभसि सान्तरम् ॥  
नारातरणिशक्तोनां समवायोतिसुन्दरः ।  
इत्थं विचचरुपाभिर्नौकाभिः परिवेष्टिता ॥  
तारांवा महर्तो नौकामधिगम्य विराजते ॥

Chap. 31. 12-18.  
21-23.

"There is a great hall called 'manas' whose middle enclosure comprises the nectar-lake. There is no way to go into it save the conveyance of a boat. There is the great *śakti*, Tārā by name, who controls the gate. There are many attendants of Tārā who are dark like the blue lotus and are sporting in the waters of the lake with thousands of boats of jewels. They come to this shore and go back to the other shore. There are millions of boat-women under Tārā who are in the prime of youth. They dance and sing the most

sacred fame of the goddess. Some hold oars and others conches in their hands. They are drinking the nectar-water (of the lake) and going hither and thither on hundreds of those boats. Of these *śaktis* who guide the boats and have dark colour the chief one is Tārā, the mother, who can calm the floods. Without the permission of Mantriṇī and Daṇḍanātha, Tārā does not allow even Śiva to come in the waters of the *Vāpikā* or lake. The union of Tārā and the 'Powers controlling the boats' (*taraṇi-śakti*) is indeed very charming. Thus Tārā, the mother, surrounded by various boats and herself occupying a large boat shines exceedingly."

After this comes the description of Vārūṇī and then of Kurukullā, who like Tārā herself, have their subservient *śaktis*, occupy bejewelled boats and guard their *kakshās* or enclosures. Kurukullā is described as follows:—

तयोस्तुशालयोर्मध्ये कक्ष्याभूरखिला मुने ।  
विमर्शवापिकानाम सौपुष्णामृतरूपिणी ॥  
तत्र नौकेश्वरी देवी कुरुकुलेति विद्युता ।  
तमालश्यामलाकारा श्यामकंचुकधारिणी ॥  
नौकेश्वरीभिरन्याभिस्ससमानाभिराहता ।  
रत्नारिचकरा नित्यमुल्लसन्मदमांसला ।  
परितो भ्राम्यति मुने मणिनौकाधरोहिणी ॥

"Midway between the two halls there is a lake called Vimarśa where there is the goddess called Kurukullā who lords over the boats. She is dark like the *Tamāla* tree and wears a dark bodice. She is surrounded by other mistresses of boats who are also like her. She holds an oar of jewels in her hands and is powerful owing to her ever increasing intoxication, or exhilaration. She moves all around, O Sage! occupying the boat of jewels."

That Tārā of the *tantras* was not known to the earlier Brahmanical literature will be best evidenced by the *Agni-Purāṇa* for, while describing the images of the *devīs* or goddesses, it mentions Tārā only as a *Yoginī*. Here I may point out the fact, which looks significant, that when enumerating the sixty-four *yoginīs* it names two, namely, Akshobhyā and Sarvajñā, which cannot fail to remind us of Buddha—Buddha the unperturbed or calm and Buddha the omniscient. Akshobhya we know is one of the *Dhyāni Buddhas* and *Sarvajñā* is one of the recognized names of Buddha.<sup>1</sup> This Tārā and the Tārā of the *Mayadīpikā*, referred to elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> are evidently one, but Tārā, the Mahāvidyā, is different. Besides, the *Yoginīs* are of a far lower rank than a *devatā* though they are worshipped at every auspicious occasion. Whether the Tārā of the *Lalitopākhyāna* or the *Brahmāṇḍa-Purāṇa* is known to the *tantras* I am not certain. Possibly she is not. The *Brahmāṇḍa-Purāṇa* may be regarded as one of the earlier *Purāṇas* for, as pointed out by Bühler long ago, the account

Chap. 52.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Amarakośha* 1. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoir* No. XI, p. 3.



of the kings given in it stops with the Imperial Guptas and their contemporaries, which could not have been the case had the *Purāṇa* been composed after the fifth century A.D.

The next reference to Tārā in a work which, strictly speaking, may hardly be termed *tāntrika* is perhaps in the *Laghustuti* 'the little or short eulogy,' a good edition of which with the commentary of Rāghavānanda has been brought out by M. M. Ganapati Sastri of Trivandrum. It has been quoted elsewhere and I need not repeat what I have already said there.<sup>1</sup> This beautiful little poem was, according to the commentator Rāghavānanda, composed by an author who was called Laghubhāṭṭāraka. The name Laghubhāṭṭāraka, however, seems to me to be more like a *takhallus* or *nom de guerre* than a real name and a reference to the last stanza of the poem would suggest that it was taken by the author in consideration of his '*laghutvam*' or smallness evidently out of *kasarnafsi* or modesty. The name of the poem, too, would lead to the same inference. What his real name was I do not know. Nor am I aware of his date. Still, I do not think the work is earlier than the seventh or eighth century A.D.

In the Brahmanical *tantra* works Tārā is well known and is one of the chief divinities if not the principal one. In some cases she is regarded as unequalled in so far as she is 'quick in granting boons' or success—

‘नैव तारासमा काचिदेवता सिद्धिदायिनो’.

The true Brahmanical *tantra*-books do not appear to be very old. Perhaps they do not go back farther than the 6th century A.D. and owing to this reason, Tārā, as represented in them, is not to be found in older literature. How she is described in these *Tantras* we shall see presently.

The inscriptions known to me do not mention the Brahmanical Tārā though they speak of Tārā the Buddhist divinity. The earliest mention of the Buddhist Tārā in an epigraphical document, so far as I am aware, is in the Nāgarī inscription of Java which is dated in the *Śaka* year 700 (A.D. 778). The next in date is the Chālukyan inscription of the reign of Tribhuvanamalla Vikramāditya, VI, whose reign began in the *Śaka* year 1017, i.e., 1095-6 A.D.

Tārā is a very important and popular deity in the *tantra* literature current in Northern India. According to the *Samayāchāratantra* she belongs to the *Uttarāmnāya* or the sacred texts of the north. It is owing to this fact that she is not so well known in Southern India. Tradition, recorded in the *Epigraphia Indica*, would indicate that she was not known there before the 8th century. It says that during the reign of king Himaśītala of Kāñchī (cir. 8th century A.D.) there arose a serious quarrel for supremacy, between the Jainas and the Buddhists. The latter wanted to establish themselves in Southern India but were overcome together with their goddess Tārā who had then secretly descended into a pot, by the Jaina teacher Akalanāka-deva

<sup>1</sup> Memoir No. XI, p. 5.

at Kāñchī. Rao Bahadur H. Krishna Sastri tells me that it is rumoured that the goddess at Kāñchī, called Kāmākshī, is worshipped on certain days in the week with all the ritual of Śāktaism,<sup>1</sup> much condemned by the Brahmans, and it is not improbable that the goddess Kāmākshī is the Buddhist goddess Tārā of this Jaina-Buddhist dispute. That Tārā never gained ground in the south is further evidenced by the *Tatvanidhi*, a very useful collection of highly interesting quotations from various works and utterances by famous persons or authors bearing on the Hindu pantheon, which was compiled by Śrī Mummadi Krishnarāja Odaya, the ruler of Mysore. It gives a *dhyaṇa* of Ugra-Tārā<sup>2</sup> but instead of naming any authority simply says *āmnāye* "in the sacred texts." This will show that the author of the work and his group of learned pandits, 'प्राचीननिबन्धसारसमुद्रणचक्षुः पण्डितसहस्र'—

were not quite familiar with the books or *tantras* bearing on the cult of the goddess and this could not have been the case had she been a popular divinity in the south. The *Uttarāmnāya* seems to be hardly known there even in these days. The late Mr. Gopi Nath Rao in his learned book on Hindu iconography, which was based on the principal *āgamas* known in the south, leaves out Tārā altogether!

Tārā is perhaps known to all the chief *tantras* of the north.<sup>3</sup> The *dhyaṇa* of Tārā is given in some of these as well as other *tantra* works as has been noticed by me already<sup>4</sup> and need not be recapitulated here. The description of the goddess in these works presupposes, apparently, a prototype which, as will be shown later on, was the Buddhist divinity of that name. Leaving aside other considerations this fact alone is a sufficient proof of the late origin of these works. The legend according to which Vasishṭha went to Mahāchīna to learn the mode of worshipping Tārā from Buddha himself as it was not known to anybody else and was different from the Brahmanical method of worshipping gods and goddesses would lead us to the same conclusion. The comparison of the traits in the *dhyaṇas*, as shown below, will lend an additional support to this hypothesis.

A goddess Tārā is known to the Jaina pantheon also, though there she does not seem to hold a chief rank. Hemachandra in his *Abhidhānachintāmaṇi* mentions Sūtārakā or Sūtārā as the *Śāsanādevatā* of the ninth Jina, namely, Suvidhinātha. According to the Śvetāmbara view, Sūtārā and Sūtārakā are identical, *ka* being a mere *svārtha* affix, and I doubt if there is any difference

<sup>1</sup> The priests in charge, however, denied it when I made a personal enquiry at the time of my visit last year.

<sup>2</sup> This *dhyaṇa* runs as follows:—

प्रत्नलोदपदार्पितां त्रिशवभृद्वीराङ्गसा परा ।  
खड्गेन्द्रीवरशूलखर्परधरा हुंकारबीजोद्भवा ॥  
खर्वा नीलविशालपिङ्गलजटाजूटोद्यनागैर्हता ।  
जाड्यन्यस्य कपालके चिजगतां हन्युग्रतारा स्वयम् ॥

<sup>3</sup> A. K. Maitra, Introduction to the *Tārā-Tantram*, one of the publications of the Varendra Research Society.

<sup>4</sup> Memoir No. XI, p. 4.



Tārā as conceived  
in Jain mythology.  
Vol. XXXII. pp.  
459 ff.

between these terms and the name Tārā. This identification is supported by the fact that Bhṛikuṭī, who is another Buddhist form of Tārā, is, according to the Śvetāmbaras, the Śāsanādevī attendant on Chandraprabha, the 8th Jina. To find a divinity of the Brahmanical or Buddhist pantheon doing duty as an attendant on a Jina in the Jaina cult should cause no wonder for this is only an attempt to show the superiority of the latter over the former. Similar things we find in Mahāyāna Buddhism as well. How far back this cult of Śāsanādevīs goes cannot be said definitely, still, analogy would show that this conception of Sutārā or Sutārakā arose after the cult of Tārā. We know that the Jainas also placed the divinities of the Hindu pantheon in positions subordinate to those of their own. It may be noted here that it is the Śvetāmbaras who know these two names, the Digambaras call Bhṛikuṭī 'Jvālāmālīnī' and Sutārakā 'Mahākālī.' The *dhyāna* of these two Śāsanādevīs, as given by Burgess in his article on the Digambara Jaina Iconography, which appeared some years ago in the Indian Antiquary, is:—

'Jvālāmālīnī or Bhṛikuṭī, the Yakshiṇī of Chandraprabha, has eight arms, bearing various weapons and two snakes. Flames issue from her *mukuta*. Her *lāñchhana* is the bull.' The following figure reproduced from the said article shows how she is represented in the Digambara iconography.



FIG. 1.

Mahākālī or Sutārakā,<sup>1</sup> the Yakshiṇī of Suvidhinātha has four arms with rod and fruit(?) but no cognizance, as would appear from the following copy of the drawing also given there.



FIG. 2.

A goddess of the name of Tāri is known to some of the aboriginal people, e.g., the Khonds, but she appears to be neither Brahmanical nor Jaina nor Buddhist. In the account given by Prof. Avery in the Indian Antiquary she is shown as the earth goddess and since she presided over fertility, human victims were immolated, chiefly at the time of sowing, to propitiate her. The Khonds say that the goddess Tāri lives in heaven with her beneficent husband Bara Pennu. This blood-thirsty goddess has nothing in common with our Tārā, the 'Saviourress,' though the beneficence of her husband may remind us of the great compassionate Avalokiteśvara. The resemblance of the names can hardly be taken as a proof of identity especially when we remember the maxim that sound etymology does not depend on the similarity of sound.

It is difficult to say which is the earliest image of Tārā known to us, but so far as I am aware, no representations of her are known dating before the sixth century A.D. I believe, moreover, that early statuary knows only the Buddhist Tārā and not the Brahmanical Tārā, indeed I do not remember to

Tāri of the aborigines.

Vol. XIV. pp. 128-29.

Tārā in sculpture.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson; *The Heart of Jainism*, p. 312 (chart).



have seen any really Brahmanical Tārā figure which may with certainty be ascribed to even the late mediæval period. The testimony of Yüan Chuang shows that Tārā—not the second Mahāvidyā but the Bodhisattva—was very popular in his time. In the eighth century her worship extended to Java as is evidenced by a *Nāgarī* inscription recording the date of the construction in the year 1700 of the Śaka era (=A.D. 778) of the sanctuary called Kalasan Chandi which, as is shown by the remains, must have been one of the most remarkable temples of the island. In this epigraph we find a *Śailendra*<sup>1</sup> prince, the founder of the sanctuary, doing homage to Tārā, the saviour of men, as the noble and venerable one 'whose smile made the sun to shine and whose frown made darkness to envelope the terrestrial sphere.' This temple was dedicated to Tārā herself whose image it enshrined and that image is, perhaps, as would appear from the account given by Scheltema,<sup>2</sup> the one which lies in the Residency grounds at Diokjakarta. Later on, i.e., about the twelfth century, she became still more popular and we are told that there was hardly a household altar in North India in those days without a statue of Tārā.<sup>3</sup>

Tārā in Buddhism.

Tārā holds the same place in Buddhism which the goddess Durgā has in Brahmanism. She figures as the counterpart or Śakti of Avalokiteśvara just as Durgā is the Śakti of Śiva. The latter, namely, Durgā, is depicted as the mother of the gods—the highest in the Brahmanical mythology. Similarly in the Buddhist or Mahāyāna pantheon, Tārā is represented as the mother of the Buddhas as well as Bodhisattvas. Then she appears as practically independent—a Bodhisattva not inferior to any other, rather superior, who could be approached directly without the aid of any intermediary, which is not the case with other divinities of the first rank and consequently accounts for her great popularity. How she is chiefly represented by the Buddhists and how she compares with the Brahmanical Tārā I have already shown.

Origin of Tārā probably Buddhist.

From what has been remarked above, it can be inferred that the goddess Tārā was Buddhist originally. Let us see how far this surmise is correct. I have tried to show that this goddess is practically unknown to the earlier Brahmanical books where if any distinct personality is mentioned under the name of Tārā it seems to be more Buddhist than Brahmanical. The *tantras* themselves show that the cult of Tārā must have been Buddhist in origin or in other words the Brahmanical mythology took it from the Buddhist pantheon. They admit that it is by *chīnāchāra*, i.e., the Chinese mode of worship or the Mahāyāna rites that Tārā is to be propitiated. This *chīnāchāra* is highly praised and described at length in works like the *Nilatantra*<sup>4</sup> and is mentioned in the *Tārā-rahasya-vṛttikā* of Śaṅkarāchārya, the son of Kamalākara and grandson of Lambodara. The legend of Buddha and Vasishṭha is given not

<sup>1</sup> See J. F. Scheltema; *Monumental Java*, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 182, 201.

<sup>3</sup> Miss Getty. *The gods of etc.*, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 15th of the manuscript in the Varendra Research Society which is dated 1626 of the Śaka era, and which I got for examination through Mr. A. K. Maitra, the obliging director of the Society.

only in the *Achāratantra*, but in the well-known *tantra* works like the *Rudra-yāmala* or the *Brahma-yāmala*. Some of the *tāntric* treatises, like the *Tārārahasya-vṛttikā*, call Tārā as *Prajñāpāramitā*, which is decidedly a Buddhist appellation.<sup>1</sup> Besides this, the fact that Akshobhya, as I have shown already, is placed on her head will lend a very strong support to the hypothesis that Tārā must have had a Buddhist origin. The term Akshobhya 'the unmovable' as an attribute may be applied to Śiva or to any other Brahmanical god. But it is not a familiar name in the Hindu mythology. On the other hand, it is very common in Buddhism or Mahāyānism. The Hinayāna also knows it as an epithet of Buddha. In the *tantras*, for example the *Todalatantra*, I find that Śiva is called 'Akshobhya' and Tārā is his wife:—

समुद्रमथने देवि ! कालकूटं समुत्थितम् ।

सर्वे देवाश्च देव्यश्चमहाचोभमवाप्नुयुः ॥

क्षोभादिरहितं यस्मात् पीतं हालाहलं विषम् ।

अत एव महेशानि ! अक्षोभ्यः परिकीर्तितः ॥

तेन साहं महामाया तारिणी रमते सदा ।

*Todalatantra*,  
quoted in the  
*Tārātantra*  
(*Gaudagrantha-*  
*māla* text, p. 10).

'At the time when the ocean was churned there arose a deadly poison, O Goddess! and all the gods and goddesses felt very much disturbed. But as Śiva drank the deadly poison without any tremor, therefore, O Goddess! he is called Akshobhya and with him Mahāmāyā 'the great Illusion' Tārīṇī always enjoys herself.'

In the *Śivaśaktisaṅgamatantra*, a manuscript copy of which was kindly lent to me for examination by Mahāmahopādhyāya Pandit Jagadisha Chandra, the Guru of His Highness the Mahārāja of Kashmir, some time ago, Akshobhya is put down as a synonym of Śiva and Tārā a synonym of *Śakti*, for it sometimes gives इति उत्तरतंच अक्षोभ्यतारामवादे in place of 'शिवशक्तिसंवादे.' In the portion dealing with Tārā herself this *tantra* expressly says that it is by the *Chīnāchāra-krama* or the Chinese mode of worship only that Tārā can be propitiated. That the Brahmins adopted this mode is clearly shown by this book, for it says—

महाचोभक्रमो देवि द्विविधः परिकीर्तितः ।

सकलो निष्कलयेति सकलो बोधगोचरः ॥

निष्कलो ब्राह्मणानां च —

'The Mahāchīna mode, O Goddess! is twofold, namely, *sakala* and *nishkala*. The former is familiar with the Buddhists and the latter with the Brahmins. In the *Sakala* system there is no regard for शौच or 'cleanliness' (नात्र शूद्रेपेक्षास्ति) or for bathing (किं स्नानं कस्य वा स्नानं—'what is the use of bathing or who is to be bathed?'). As this idea is aversive to Brahmanism the Brahmins naturally had to modify the system according to their propensities or temperament and the *āchāra* in the Brahmanic garb was called *nishkala*.'

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. K. Maitra, Introduction to *Tārātantram*.



Akshobhya is, therefore, Śiva in the *tantras* and Śiva, we know, is Avalokiteśvara in the Mahāyāna pantheon, with Tārā as his recognized Śakti. That the Śakti of Śiva is called Tārā we have just seen in the *Śivaśaktisaṅgama-tantra*. All other points showing similarity in the two cults I have brought out in my former note already. That Akshobhya is the seer or *Rishi* of the *mantra* of Tārā, though, apparently, a Brahmanic idea, is quite in the fitness of things a Buddhist feature: Akshobhya is Buddha and Tārā is *Prajñāpāramitā* or the highest knowledge revealed to him—he indeed is the veritable seer or *Rishi* who got the *bodhi* or enlightenment while sitting in the ‘adamantine posture’ unmoved and undaunted by the hosts of Māra, the Evil Spirit.

Now the question which presents itself for solution is where did Tārā originate—in India or outside India? What has been stated above about the fate of the goddess in Southern India precludes the possibility of her having a South-Indian origin. The *Tantras* call her northern or a deity of the *Uttarām-nāya* thus showing that she originated in the north. Let us see which tract gave birth to her. The *Sādhnamālā* as quoted by M. Foucher<sup>1</sup> would show that Nāgārjuna revived the worship of Ekajātā, a principal form of the goddess, amongst the Bhoṭas or the country of Tibet, for it says:—

एकजटासाधनं समाप्तम्-आयनागाञ्जन-पादेभ्योऽष्टभूता इति ।

meaning ‘The end of the manual of worship of Ekajātā—Ekjātā was revived in the Bhoṭas or the country of Tibet by the Rev. Nāgārjuna.’ This revival (or *uddhāra*—*ut* + *hr*—to lift up) would, obviously, imply that the worship of the goddess had already existed in Tibet—the people there had given it up and it was again raised or resuscitated by Nāgārjuna like the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice, which, as we learn from numismatic or epigraphical evidences, was resuscitated by Samudragupta, the Napoleon of India. How far are we to rely on this statement of the *Sādhana* we shall see presently. In any case it confirms the view that Tārā worship originated in the North.

The Buddha-Vasishṭha legend alluded to above would show that her worship was brought from the country of *Chīna* or *Mahāchīna* where the seer Vasishṭha was sent by Brahman, his father, to learn it, evidently because it was not known in India. The identity of the sage does not matter much. He might be a man of the *gotra* of Vasishṭha, but the country called *Chīna-deśa* or *Mahāchīna* in the *tantras* does not appear to have been identical with China. The *Mahābhārata*, the *Arthasāstra* of Kautilya, the dramas of Kālidāsa and other texts would all point towards China, which exported the classical *Chīnā-mśuka*, as the *Chīna-deśa*. But the *tantras* like the *Rudra-yāmala* would make us locate the country nearer home close to the great Himalaya. The following verse of this *Tantra* quoted in the *Tārātantra* would show that it lay by the side of Himalaya.

ततो गत्वा महाचीनदेशे ज्ञानमयो मुनिः ।

ददर्श हिमवत्पार्श्वे साधकेभ्यस्सेविते ॥

This condition, however, is not fulfilled in the case of China proper. That we have to look to the other side of the mountain is suggested by the *Brahma-yāmala*,

<sup>1</sup> Iconographie bouddhique, p. 78.

Origin of Tārā  
probably non-  
Indian.

Tārātantra.

which says that Vasishṭha first repaired to the Kāmākhyā hills or Assam and practised austerities there. Failing to propitiate the goddess he had to proceed to *Chīna-deśa*. It would appear that the term चीन or महाचीन was used comprehensively to include the country bordering on the northern side of the great snowy mountain, especially Tibet. China is known for her silks and the *Chīnāmśuka* did come from *Chīna* or China proper. But the term *Chīna-deśa* or *Mahā-chīna* of the *tantras* designates the great Chinese Empire which included, as it does even now, the countries called Tibet and Eastern Turkistan as its dependencies. Vasishṭha proceeded to that part of *Mahāchīna* which lay by the side of Himalaya and which was probably identical with Tibet where Tārā is very popular even now while her worship is practically unknown in China proper. Tibetan Lamas, we know, worship their deities by the *tāntric* rites using wine.

Regarding the place of origin of Tārā or Tārā-worship I am of opinion that we should rather look towards the Indo-Tibetan borderland or Indian Tibet than any other region. Why I am led to hold this view is that the *Svatantra-tantra* speaks of her origin in a great lake called Cholana. As quoted in the Archaeological Survey Report of Mayurabhanja, it says:—

मेरोः पश्चिमकूले तु चोलनाख्यो ह्रदो महान् ।

तत्र जज्ञे स्वयं तारा देवो नोलसरस्वती ॥

‘On the Western slope of Meru there is a great lake called Cholana (or Cholanā). There the goddess Tārā Nilasarasvatī was of herself born.’

Meru or Sumeru is a mythical mountain believed to be standing at the centre of Jambudvīpa or Asia. Taking Eastern Turkistan or the Indian-Tibet to be at the centre of this continent and remembering that the Indo-Tibetan borderland, as we find from the account given by Dr. A. H. Francke in his book on the antiquities of Indian Tibet,<sup>1</sup> has got several large lakes like Thsomo Riri and M’Thsod-kar on whose shores ancient monasteries are still to be seen, it is not impossible that the author of this book had some such region in his mind. There is no wonder if the people of such a tract thought of a deity who would help them to cross the lakes. Dr. Francke<sup>2</sup> tells us that near Khalatse, on the right bank of the Indus there is a rock below the village called Tar “on which people believe they can see twenty-one figures of the goddess Tārā (S Grol-ma) which have come into existence of themselves.” He also says that “these *Svayambhu* figures of Tārā may account for the name of the village which was probably called Tārā originally, the name having become abridged to Tar.” This account becomes much more interesting when we find a place called Meru, pronounced Miru,<sup>3</sup> and a very ancient monastery on the top of a hill there above the trade road, which reminds us of the Meru mentioned in the quotation from the *Svatantra-tantra*. These facts lead me to surmise that Tārā-worship originated somewhere toward Ladakh. History knows well the sway Buddhism held over

Place of origin  
of Tārā-worship.

By N. N. Basu,  
Vol. I, p. XXXIV.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XXXVIII of the Archaeological Survey of India, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65.



these tracts and the regions around including Chinese Turkistan. Evidences of it have been brought to light in abundance by Sir Aurel Stein and other scholars. The itineraries of the Chinese pilgrims, Fa-hien (A.D. 399-415), Song-Yun and Hwei-seng (A.D. 518-521) and Yüan Chuang (A.D. 629-645) afford ample testimony of it. About the seventh century Buddhism reached here its culminating point, for, in Khotan alone there were not less than 100 monasteries and 500 monks and Indian sacred literature was widely diffused—though tokens of decay were already there. It penetrated into these regions at an early date and began to flourish by the 5th century of the Christian era. Apparently then Tārā originated about that epoch. From Ladakh she travelled to Tibet where she became the most popular deity.<sup>1</sup> The manual of her worship, namely, “*S Grol-madkar snon-gyi bs tod-pa gzuns*” or the praise and *dhāraṇī* of the Pure and Original Tārā, Waddell tells us, is in the hands of nearly all laymen in Tibet and is perhaps the commonest book there.

Whether she is Aryan or Mongolian or say Non-Aryan by birth, like Mañjuśrī, I cannot say for certain because although at the dawn of history this part of Asia was inhabited by the Aryans yet by the beginning of the Christian era it had a mixed population of Aryans and Ural-Altains. That she is not exactly Indian by birth seems to be fairly certain. She is very popular in Nepal and it is not unlikely that she was introduced into India through Nepal.

**The Nature of her origin.**—As her very name would show Tārā (from *tri*—to swim across) is primarily the saviouress or deliveress, who carries her votaries across waters or troubles. The names by which she is chiefly known in Tibet, China, Korea or Japan all give the same meaning. It is true that the chief function of every deity in whatever mythology we see is to deliver the votary from distress. Still we find that each deity has a particular function for which he or she is specially invoked. For instance in Hindu mythology Mrityuñjaya Śiva is invoked for longevity, Maṅgala for removing debts and Śitalā for getting rid of small-pox. In Muhammadanism the aid of Khwāja Khizir is invoked at the time of troubles caused by waters. He is also invoked by travellers who lose their way. The aid of Ali Murtaza is sought for at the time of dire distress in consequence of which he is called Muskhil Kushā, Ali the saviour from distress. So Tārā is the deity who safely carries the worshippers across the waters. Some of the texts quoted above are quite clear on this point, for instance, the *Laghustuti* which expressly says that she is to be invoked to cross flooded waters. The deity connected with swimming or crossing of waters can easily be taken as one who controls navigation. The description of Tārā or Kurukullā given in the *Lalitopākhyāna* or the *Brahmāṇḍa-Purāṇa*, quoted above, indisputably proves that she is the goddess of navigation. She is the *Navikeśvarī*, the mistress of boats, has oars of jewels and occupies the boat of jewels. It is she who is capable of suppressing floods, ‘जलौघमनचमा’ and has countless boat-women under her who

<sup>1</sup> *Buddhism of Tibet* (Lamaism), p. 339.

move about with hundreds of boats, evidently to watch and save people in distress. The latter are the *śaktis* of boating or navigation with whom Tārā looks resplendent—

‘तारातरणिशक्तीनां समवायोऽतिसुन्दरः’.

Their colour is the colour of the ocean and apparently they are the personification of oceanic waves whom Tārā controls. Verily she is the goddess whose aid an adventurer will seek for when he goes out in search of wealth to distant lands plunging his boats into the wide and deep sea.<sup>1</sup> It is true that the *tantras* do not call her a goddess of navigation nor do they connect her with it, but her *dhyaṇa* describing her as seated on a white lotus rising above the all-pervading waters goes to favour this view. In the *tantras* she is at times invoked for gaining control over speech or knowledge and her aid is sought for feats of learning. In fine, people will worship her for ‘quick’ success. This is due to their connecting the name Tārā with *tvarā*, meaning haste, as would appear from the *mantras* like the following which is engraved on the back of one of the images excavated at Nālandā:—

जं तारे तुत्तारे तुरे स्वाहा.

The same is the case, perhaps, with the Buddhist books, for, they do not supply, as far as I know, any clear statements connecting Tārā with waters or navigation. Their Kurukullā, too, is different from the goddess of that name who figures in the *Lalitopākhyāna* as a sea-goddess. Still, I think, proofs are not wanting to show that even the Buddhists sought her aid for overcoming the distress caused by waters or oceanic storms. Epigraphical as well as sculptural evidence is in favour of this view. For instance I may mention the inscription of the reign of the Chālukya king Tribhuvanamalla Vikramāditya VI belonging to the Śaka year 1017 (A.D. 1096) which goes to prove the point. This inscription is incised on a stone tablet which bears the figure of Tārā herself. The very first and the last verse of this interesting record will supply the proof. They read, respectively, as follows:—

Fleet, *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. X, pp. 185 ff.

(a) हरिकरिशिखिफणितस्करनिगलजलार्णवपिशाचभयशमनि !

शशिकिरणकान्तिधारिणि ! भगवति तारे नमस्तुभ्यम् ॥

(b) पाथः पार्थिववर्जिपूगपवनप्रख्यातभोल्याकुल—

प्राणत्राणविधानलब्धकरणाव्यापारचिन्तातुरा ।

प्रोद्यत्तस्करसिन्धुसिन्धुरहरिव्यालादिशंकापहा

तारातूर्णवितौर्णवाञ्छितफला पायास्तदा सङ्गमम् ॥

Fleet rendered these verses thus:—

(a) Reverence to Thee O Holy Tārā who dost allay the fear of lions, elephants, and fire and hooded snakes and thieves and fetters and water and the ocean and demons and who dost bear a splendour like that of the rays of the moon.

<sup>1</sup> The *Toḍalatantra* (IV Chapter) will also favour this view.



- (b) May the goddess Tārā, who is anxiously busied with her exercise of tenderness entailed by preserving (persons possessed of) souls who are distressed by the notorious fear of water and kings and volumes of fire and wind; who takes away the dread of bold thieves and oceans and elephants and lions and snakes, etc., and who quickly confers the rewards that are desired,—always preserve saṅgama.'

In these verses, as was remarked by Burgess, she is no doubt addressed as delivering her votaries from the very eight forms of evil which *Avalokiteśvara*<sup>1</sup> is represented as saving from, for example, in a very fine bas-relief at Kānheri which is reproduced here from a drawing published in the Cave Temples of India. It is marked (c) on plate I.

But this, I believe, is merely due to henotheistic ideas according to which each divinity reigns supreme in his or her sphere. Here Tārā is regarded as powerful enough to ward off every evil to seek security against which a worshipper will sometimes, as in the above-quoted *Laghustuti*, invoke several *śaktis* like Lakshmi, Jayā, Kshemānkari, Śavari, Mahābhairavi, Tripurā and Tārā, though each of them can individually grant all the boons to the *upāsakas*, who, as a rule, will invoke their *iṣṭadevatā* and no other deity. Still this epigraph in which the calamities caused by waters or ocean are mentioned twice (*pāṭhas* and *jala* both meaning water and *sindhu* and *aṇṇava* both signifying ocean)—in one and the same verse and Tārā is praised as removing them and at the same time 'the notorious fear of water' is named first and Tārā is described as very anxious to preserve her votaries from it—I think it stands to reason that the composer of the *praśasti* thought Tārā to be the chief deity concerned with the safe crossing of waters.

The sculpture, representing Avalokiteśvara and Tārā, which is reproduced above, symbolizes the fear of ship-wreck like other fears and depicts it just at the foot of the figure of Tārā which is significant and suggestive—Tārā holds this fear under her feet. The belief, that Tārā is the saviouress or deliveress from the ocean of existence, to be met with in the Buddhist mythology, looks to be secondary or later—to cross an ocean is after all a trifling worldly bliss compared with the crossing of the ocean of existence or *bhavasāgara*, i.e., final emancipation which brings on eternal beatitude. Why invoke her for such a small or trifling affair which can be managed by skilful boatmen or sailors? Her worship can hardly be meant for such a *preyas* or worldly pleasures, her aid should be sought for the real *śreyas* or freedom from transmigration, that dreaded '*Chourāsi*' the boisterous and terrible ocean of birth and re-birth. Thus, Tārā is the goddess who ensures safety in crossing the real ocean or is Tārīṇī, the saviouress. She sprang from the ocean of knowledge—

‘ज्ञानाण्वमयनात्ममुदिता’

and allays the misery or affliction of existence 'भवतापदुःखमनो'. She is the real knowledge or *prajñā* and it is knowledge which alone can give salvation 'ऋते ज्ञानात्तमुक्तिः'. We thus find that Tārā came out of an extensive lake and was

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Durgā is praised in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa* or *Durgā-saptasāhī*, Chap. XI, st. 107, as protecting people from all these evils.

thought of as seated on a lotus emerging from water. She controls flooded waters and enables her votaries to cross them safely. She is *Tārīṇī* or the personification of power that takes us across waters. Verily it is she on whose mercy success in sailing will depend. By her very nature she becomes the goddess of navigation. Originally she was invoked for safe swimming and for taking small vessels or boats across the lakes in the regions where her worship arose. In course of time, however, she began to be worshipped for safe and successful navigation in the sea. To a votary, on the other hand, whose goal is emancipation all this becomes an allegory. For him the human body is the vessel and the miseries of the world the tempestuous waters. He invokes the compassionate Deliveress to cross the ocean of existence and get rid of the miseries which overwhelm him from all sides as do the mighty oceanic waves the man who has fallen off the board. The very conception or *dhyāna* of the goddess in both the Buddhist and Hindu mythologies would favour this view.

After attempting the question of her probable origin let us see when she was first thought of, or the probable date when people began to worship her for the first time. That she was Buddhist originally I have tried to demonstrate above, and that she is a Mahāyāna deity does not require any proof. That she is the *śakti* of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is also well known. When the cult of this Bodhisattva came into existence cannot be stated definitely at present. In all probability, it does not go back beyond the early centuries of the Christian era. In any case this is certain that originally he had no *śaktis* attached to him. At least this is known by the earliest representations of the deity known to me, for example, the one on the railing figure in the Lucknow Museum mentioned elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> where he is shown single. Tārā seems to be unknown before the 4th century of the Christian era. I think she is unknown to the Graeco-Buddhist school of Gandhāra. The earliest representations may be those in the well-known Buddhist caves<sup>2</sup> of India like those at Nasik,<sup>1</sup> Ellora, and Kānheri. These, as far as we know, cannot be anterior to about the 6th century A.D., for, they belong to the temples which are certainly of Mahāyāna origin and which in all probability belong to the 6th or 7th century A.D. The earlier caves of 'grandiose design' and 'simple detail' are of the Hīnayāna school and as such could not accommodate the gods and goddesses of the 'Great vehicle.' These caves are not posterior to the latter half of the 4th century or say to the 5th century A.D. Of course, some time must have elapsed before this cult was introduced into the west of India. I am not aware of the existence of Tārā figures which may be positively ascribed to a period preceding the 6th century. The conception of the ten Mahāvidyās is much later. The *Māṭṛikās* were probably known before them and this is borne out by the textual references and sculptures which have been noticed already. Tārā became popular in the 7th century. It was this period, that is the early mediæval—lying between the 6th and 8th centuries, when Hindu

The probable date of her origin.

<sup>1</sup> Memoir No. XI.

<sup>2</sup> *Cave Temples* (Fergusson and Burgess), pages 278, 384, 391, also page 358, plate IV, reproduced above.



emigration seems to have largely taken place towards Java and other islands, and it was this time when a deity like Tārā was needed for help. As a goddess, who saved her votaries from floods and enabled them to cross waters safely, she was soon connected with navigation. Images of Tārā are found in Java which belong to the same period, for example, the one spoken of by M. Foucher<sup>1</sup> or by Scheletama,<sup>2</sup> which has been noticed above, or some of those illustrated below, i.e., figures marked (b) and (e) on plate IV.

I believe there is a general consensus of opinion among scholars that it was the male principle which was chiefly worshipped by the Indo-Aryans and that *sakti*-worship came in later. The female divinities, like Ushas (or the Dawn), are no doubt known in the Vedas but they are hardly of the first rank. There is no mention of the *sakti* as conceived in later times in the earlier literature. The legends like the one given in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa*, which has been alluded to above, would indicate that originally a goddess was the 'divine energy' or *devatva*, i.e., the god-head of a god. Later on, this idea of energy was transformed into that of a consort. The same thing occurred in Buddhism which probably borrowed the idea from Brahmanism or Hinduism where the wife is regarded to be one half and the husband the other half, as is represented by the figures of *Ardhanārīśvara* Śiva.

The association of Nāgārjuna, the well-known Buddhist patriarch, with the worship of Tārā or Ekajaṭā is not convincing. Whatever be his exact date it seems to be certain that Nāgārjuna belongs to the very early centuries of the Christian era. He was looked upon as one of the greatest magicians or *tātrikas*. People connected his name with the worship of Ekajaṭā or Tārā for obvious reasons. In the *Sādhana*, quoted above, he is said to have revived Ekajaṭā amongst the Bhoṭas or Tibetans. If it so happened in reality, then, the worship of Ekajaṭā, or for that reason, of Tārā also must have existed long before his time and this will carry Tārā to an epoch prior to the Christian era. But the evidence available, as seen already, goes against such a possibility. Besides, I do not think female divinities were introduced into the Mahāyāna school so early. It was the male principle and not the female which was worshipped by the Mahāyāna school in the beginning. We know Buddha himself was averse to the admission of women-folk into the *saṅgha* and it was at the strong intercession of Ānanda that he, almost reluctantly, allowed his aunt and her female companions to be taken in, declaring at the same time that the *dharma* or *saṅgha* will not survive long, a prophesy which was fulfilled, if only partially, as Buddhism has indeed died out in the country of its birth. Such ideas could not but exert great influence on the minds of the people. How could they ignore what Buddha said and begin to worship female divinities so soon? The fact that the Graeco-Buddhist school of Gandhāra has remarkably few female images would lead to the same inference. That Tārā is a late comer into the fold of Buddhism is further shown by the fact that the Gandhāra sites which have been so far explored and which are

<sup>1</sup> *Buddhist Art*, page 265.

<sup>2</sup> *Monumental Java*, page 181.

not later than the fifth century A.D. have not yielded any of her images. Apparently, I think, the name of Nāgārjuna was associated with Tārā to make the cult more attractive and important, if he is to be taken as identical with the well-known founder of the Mādhyamika school. If he is a different personality his association with the cult will hardly matter much unless, of course, he is shown to be equally old. The other Nāgārjunas known to me, however, are certainly not so old as the founder of the Mādhyamika school. *Sakti* worship was probably introduced into Mahāyānism about the 6th century A.D. The idea developed to such an extent that in countries like Tibet and Mongolia people thought that a god was more disposed to listen to them and grant their requests when worshipped in company with his *Sakti*.<sup>1</sup> As a result nearly every god was given a *Sakti* or female energy represented with him in the so-called 'Yabyum' attitude which was the final sign of the degradation of the Mahāyāna School.

As remarked above, the worship of Tārā came to India possibly through Nepal and migrated to Kāliṅga through Magadha whence it not only went to other parts of India but to distant lands like Java, the ancient *Yavadvīpa*. She appears to have been one of the principal deities worshipped at Nālandā, as will be borne out both by the finds recently made during the excavations and by the testimony of Yüan Chuang whose itinerary mentions a large figure of the deity worshipped at Nālandā by the kings and ministers and great people of the neighbouring countries who on every first day of the year made offerings of perfumes and flowers holding gem-covered flags and canopies while music was going on, the ceremony lasting for seven days.<sup>2</sup> Of the sculptures that have been excavated a good many represent this goddess. They show a marked affinity with the figures found in Bengal and adjoining places. Though without any documentary evidence it is not safe to fix dates yet I may say that it is not unlikely that the myth of Tārā arose about the 5th century A.D. and that about the 7th century, when the *Tantra* influence was at its zenith, she was Brahmanised as the second *Mahāvīdyā* and became very popular not only in India but in other countries also.

**Representations of Tārā according to Buddhists:**—Waddell<sup>3</sup> says that there are twenty-one Tārās. As is apparent from the titles or names of these twenty-one Tārās I do not think they should be taken as distinct forms of the goddess. They are rather the attributes which a votary has in view while worshipping the divinity who is one throughout. Still her forms may be considered to be two-fold, the pacific and the angry one, according to the aspects. Or she may have five forms, in accordance with the five sacred colours, namely, the white, the blue, the green, the yellow and the red. Her pacific forms will be either white or green in colour but the angry forms will be represented either red or yellow or blue. The former is characterised by a smiling expression, long and wavy hair, and the Bodhisattva ornaments. If she accompanies Avalokiteśvara she will be represented as standing, if not, she may

<sup>1</sup> Compare Miss Getty; *The gods*, etc., page 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Travels*, Vol. II, page 175.

<sup>3</sup> The cult of Avalokiteśvara and his consort Tārā; in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, January 1894, pp. 51 ff.



either be standing or seated, as will be seen in the illustrations on the plates Nos. II, III and IV which accompany this article. The figure marked (a) on the second plate lies at Jtkhauri in the Hazaribagh district of Bihar while the other, which is marked (b), is kept in the Indian Museum at Calcutta. The representations shown as a, b and c on the third plate are now exhibited in the Government Museums at Lucknow, Calcutta and Patna respectively. The images illustrated on the fourth plate are all Javanese. The one which is marked (c) is now deposited in the Indian Museum at Calcutta. The rest are, I believe, in Java, i.e., the country of their origin and I got their photographs through the courtesy of Dr. F. D. Kan Bosch, Director of Archaeology in Netherlands-India, who has very kindly permitted me to publish them along with this memoir. The bronze statuettes, marked (b) and (c), according to this scholar, respectively belong to about the year 800 and 850 of the Śaka era while the stone image of Bhṛikuṭī Tārā, marked (a) on the plate, is to be ascribed to about the middle of the 13th century A. D. Dr. Bosch identifies the figure (b) with Mārīchī and refers me to the *dhyāna*—*aśokavriksha-sākh-āvalagna-vāma-kara-vara-dakṣiṇa-karā*, which M. Foucher has quoted in his *Iconographie bouddhique*.<sup>1</sup> The figures (a) and (c) he takes to be Bhṛikuṭī-Tārā and Śyāma-Tārā, respectively. For the remaining four bronzes which are marked (d) on the plate he refers me to Waddell's note on Tārā to which I have alluded above, and says that they are not yet sufficiently determined. In her angry aspect she is shown as having dishevelled hair, the *tāntric* attributes and ornaments and a third eye.

The *dhyānas* of the chief forms of Tārā of which I have just spoken are appended to this article for ready reference and to facilitate identification. Here I should like to point out that as far as I am aware only Nepalese and Tibetan paintings conform to these *dhyānas* in every detail. The lithic or metal icons of the Goddess, such as are found in excavations or otherwise, mostly represent Śyāma-Tārā or Sita-Tārā though images of other forms like Vajra or Bhṛikuṭī-Tārā are also to be met with occasionally.

**Brahmanical Tārā.**—The comparison of the *dhyānas* given in the appendix or elsewhere shows that the Brahmanical Tārā is the angry form and closely resembles the blue Tārā or Ekajātā of the Buddhists. In other words, I may say, that it was the blue Tārā who was introduced into the *śakti*-cult of Hinduism.

The borrowing of divinities, if I can so call it, was mutual. The Buddhists took some from the Hindus and adapted them to their worship or beliefs, and so did the Hindus also. Possibly the Buddhists took more than the Hindus. The reason perhaps was that they had become weakened and their faith in their own divinities began to waver. Tārā was taken over by the Hindus for they saw that her worshippers were very prosperous and successful in their adventures—they came back from their expeditions laden with treasures and their voyages to distant countries like Java proved successful. The Hindus attributed this success to the might of their goddess whom they at once in-

<sup>1</sup> II. p. 91 Sq.

troduced into their own pantheon in order to gain her protection. The moment a votary thinks that the worship of a particular divinity ensures increased prosperity, he begins to lose faith in his own *ishta-devatā* and goes over to the other side. How such ideas work may be illustrated by the fight which took place between the armies of some *faqirs* and of Aurangzeb in which the latter were twice routed because the Muslim soldiers lost courage thinking that the *faqirs* were sorcerers, till at last, Aurangzeb came and wrote some verses from the Qurān on the swords of his soldiers and sent them back to the battlefield. The result was that the faith of these soldiers was strengthened and they fought with full vigour winning a complete victory over the enemy. A person who has many gods can have more according to his requirements or as he finds their worship to be more fruitful than that of his own gods or goddesses. But there can be no such manipulation or multiplication of gods or goddesses for one who adheres to the maxim so beautifully expressed in the Muhammadan Kalama *La ilaha illah* or the *śruti* एकमेवाद्वितीयं ब्रह्म there is no god but one and none like him.

#### Conclusion—

To sum up my conclusions: I have shown that the goddess Tārā probably had a Buddhist origin and possibly was first thought of in Indian Tibet whence she was introduced into India *via* Nepal. Her worship seems to have spread through the *Gauda* country to other parts of India and to distant lands. Originally she seems to have been the goddess who was invoked for safe crossing of waters and who saved her worshippers from the calamities caused by floods. As such, she began to be worshipped as the goddess of navigation and finally became the deliveress from the ocean of existence or *bhavasāgara*. Her worship began probably about the 5th century and she became very popular in the early mediæval period, i.e., about the 7th century when she was introduced into the Hindu pantheon, where in the beginning she was only a minor divinity but subsequently became one of the principal deities who was worshipped as the second Mahāvidyā and the deliveress or saviour from the troubles of the world, unrivalled in the quick granting of boons.

**Postscript.**—Dr. J. Ph. Vogel, after going through the first proof of this memoir, has kindly drawn my attention to Monsieur Godefray de Blonay's book on the subject, named *Matériaux pour servir à l'histoire de la déesse bouddhique* Paris 1895. Tārā. I wish I could make use of the valuable material contained in it when I was writing the memoir. However, I may remark here that, while going through the book with the help of Rev. P. Craysac, m. ap. of the French Mission at Ootacamund, who very kindly translated for me the concluding portion of it into English, I have not been able to find much, if at all, that would go to controvert or alter my views about the goddess. On the other hand, I notice in it some data which will rather support my hypotheses. For instance, the verse,

तारयिष्याम्यहं नाथ! नानाभयमहाणांवात् ।  
नेन तरेति मां लोके गायन्ति मुनिपुङ्गवाः ॥



meaning "The eminent sages in the world call me Tārā, because, O Lord! I take (my worshippers) across the ocean of various dangers", which occurs in the *Ārya-Tārā-bhāṭṭārikā-nāmāśṭottaraśataka-stōtra* quoted in full in this book, would bear out what I have stated above regarding the etymology of the name of Tārā. Monsieur Godefray de Blonay, while pointing out the mixing up of the Brahmanical and the Buddhist view of the goddess, says that Tārā saves her followers from or by water giving them landing on a safe shore and that she is the faithful guide or the sailors' star, who is invoked by sailors. This remark of the savant amply supports my hypothesis as to Tārā having been the goddess of navigation.

## APPENDIX.

THE CHIEF FORMS OR BHEDAS OF TĀRĀ.—The foremost form of Tārā is the white or Sita-Tārā who symbolizes perfect unity and represents प्रज्ञा पारमिता or Transcendental Wisdom incarnate. When alone or surrounded by acolytes, she is represented in the *vajrāsana* or the 'adamantine pose,' her right hand in the *varamudrā* or 'gift bestowing attitude' and her left hand, holding the stem of a full-blown lotus is shown in *vitarkamudrā* or the 'attitude of argument.' She generally has the third eye of knowledge or she may have seven eyes, one eye being shown on each sole and hand. As the *śakti* of Amoghasiddha she holds the stem of a lotus flower in each hand which will be shown in the 'argument' and 'charity' attitudes and the lotus flower supporting the *viśvavajra* or double thunder-bolt. In the *Mṛtyuvañchana-Tārā-Sādhana* quoted by M. Foucher she is thus described :—

सितारविन्दमध्यस्थां तां भूतां चन्द्रविस्तराम् ।  
आवहवन्नपर्यङ्कां वरदोत्पलधारिणीम् ।  
शरच्चन्द्रकलाकारां पृष्ठचन्द्रसमाश्रिताम् ।  
सर्वालङ्कारसंपूर्णां षोडशावपुःकराम् ।

The Janguli Tārā is her *Tantra* form. She may be two or four armed. This is her *dhyāna* as given in the *Sādhanamālā*—

शुक्लवर्णां चतुर्भुजां जटामुकुटिनीं शुक्लांशुकीर्त्तरीयां सितालङ्कारवतीं शुक्लसर्पैर्भूषितां सच्च-  
पर्यङ्कासनासीनां मूलभुजाभ्यां वीणां वादयन्तीं द्वितीयवामदक्षिणभुजाभ्यां सितसर्पाभय-  
मुद्राधरां चन्द्रांशुमालिनीं ध्यायेत् ।

She has white colour, four arms, a diadem of braided hair, a white upper-garment, white ornaments, is decorated with white snakes and is sitting on a sofa in a *sattva* pose? By the two original hands she plays on a flute. Of the two other hands, the left holds a white serpent and the right is extended in the *abhaya-mudrā* or the 'pose of security.' She wears a garland of the rays of the moon.

Then comes Śyāma-Tārā or Tārā the green. She differs from the white Tārā in her symbol which is *nīlotpala* or the blue-lotus and is usually shown as closed wholly or partially. She is represented seated on a lotus throne, the right leg pendent with the foot supported by a small lotus, the stem of which is attached to the lotus throne. Sometimes her lotus-throne is shown as supported by roaring lions and her head-dress has a small image of Amoghasiddha in it. Usually she has the *ūrṇā* on the forehead. If shown in company with Avalokiteśvara she generally figures on the left side. Sometimes she is accompanied by eight green Tārās, or her manifestations, Ekajaṭā and the goddess Mārīchī, or by Janguli and the goddess Mahāmayūrī. In the latter case she is called Dhanadā or 'the giver of treasures' and has four arms, the upper one having the usual *mudrā* and the lower one holding a lasso and elephant goad or *aṅkuśa*. The *Sādhana*s describe her thus :—

तारां श्यामां द्विभुजां, दक्षिणे वरदां, वामे सनालेन्द्रीवरधरां, सर्वाभरणभूषितां, पञ्चचन्द्रासने  
पर्यङ्कनिषण्णां चिन्तयेत् ।

Miss Getty, *The gods, etc.*, p. 10  
M Foucher, *Iconographie, etc.*  
64 and 65.



The *Svatantratantra* quoted by N. N. Vasu<sup>1</sup> gives a slightly different description—  
‘She is black in complexion, she has three eyes, two hands with one of which she holds a lotus and with the other she gives boons; she is surrounded by *Saktis*, having various colours and forms; she has a smiling face; she is adorned with bright pearls; her feet are put in shoes set with jewels.’

The third is the yellow Tārā called Bhṛīkuṭī, or the goddess that frowns. Evidently she is the angry form of Tārā. She has Amoghasiddha in her diadem. Her right hand is extended in the *vara-mudrā* and the left hand holds a blue lotus ... Mārīchī and Ekajaṭa sit to her right and left respectively, and she is represented as a celestial maiden adorned with jewels.’ The *Sādhana* thus describes her:—

हरितां भमोवसिहमुकुटां वरदोत्पलधारिदक्षिणवामकरां, अशोककान्तां मरीच्येकजटाव्य-  
दक्षिणवामदिग्भागां, दिव्यकुमारीं, अलङ्कारवतीं ध्यायेत् ।

*Sādhana-sam-  
haya* quoted  
by N. N. Vasu. p.  
XXXVIII.

The Khadiravarṇī Tārā and the Vajra-Tārā are the forms of this Tārā. She is represented as “seated in the midst of the *Mātrikās* (divine-mothers), having eight arms and four faces, decorated with all sorts of ornaments, having the colour of gold, looking benign and shewing the features of a maiden, seated on a moon placed on a lotus representing the universe, having faces of yellow, black, white and red complexion consecutively from left to right; having three eyes in each face; she is seated on a diamond throne, has a red-coloured body, having on her crowns the four Buddhas, and holding in her right hands a *vajra*, an arrow, a conchshell and *vara*, and in her left hands a lotus bow, diamond-goad, a diamond *pāśa* and with the fore-finger of the other left hand she points above.”

The fourth is the blue Tārā or Ekajaṭā (‘she who has only one chignon’) or Ugratārā (the ‘ferocious Tārā’). She is one of the most terrifying divinities of the Mahāyāna pantheon. Her *dhyaṇa* given in the *Mahāchīnakrama-Tārā-sādhana* runs as follows.—

प्रत्यालीढपदां घोरां मुण्डमालाप्रलंबिताम् ।  
खर्वी लम्बोदरो भोमां नीलनीरजराजिताम् ।  
त्र्यंबकैकमुखीं दिव्यां घोरादृष्टासभासुराम् ।  
सुप्रहृष्टां शवारूढां नागाष्टकाविभूषिताम् ।  
रक्तवर्तुल नेत्रां च व्याघ्रचर्मद्वितकटोम् ।  
नवयौवनसंपन्नां पद्मसद्राविभूषिताम् ।  
ललज्जिह्वां महाभोमां सदंष्ट्रोक्तभोषणाम् ।  
खड्गकर्त्रीकरां सद्ये वामोत्पलकपालधराम् ।  
पिङ्गोद्यैकजटां ध्यायेन्मौलावलीभूषिताम् ।

quoted by M.  
Pucher, *Ibid.*, p.

‘She stands in the archer’s attitude, is fierce, has a long necklace of human heads, is of short stature and has a protuberent abdomen, is terrible and adorned with a blue lotus, has one face and three eyes, is resplendent because of her wild laughter, is very happy, riding a corpse, decorated with eight snakes, has red and round eyes, wears the skin of a tiger round her waist, is

<sup>1</sup> The Archaeological Survey of Mayurabhanja, Vol. I, page LXXXV gives the following *dhyaṇa*:—

अशोककान्तां विनयनां विभुजां वरपङ्के ।  
दधानां बहुवर्णाभिर्बहुपाभिराढताम् ॥  
अस्तिभिः स्मेरवदनां स्मेरमौक्तिकभूषणाम् ।  
रत्नपादुकाद्यैर्बहुपादाभ्युज्जितां करेत् ॥

in the prime of youth, is decorated with five *mudrās*, has a protruding tongue, looks dreadful because of the jaws which are protruding; her right hands hold a sword and scissors, and the left hands hold a blue lotus and a skull; she has one tawny chignon and her head is adorned by Akshobhya.’

The fifth form is the red Tārā or Kurukullā. According to the *Sādhana* her colour is red, she is seated on a red lotus, wears a red garment and a red crown, has four arms, gives assurance of protection with one of the right hands and holds an arrow with the other, holds a quiver of jewels with one of the left hands and with the other an arrow made of red lotus-buds set on a bow of flowers which is drawn up to the ear.



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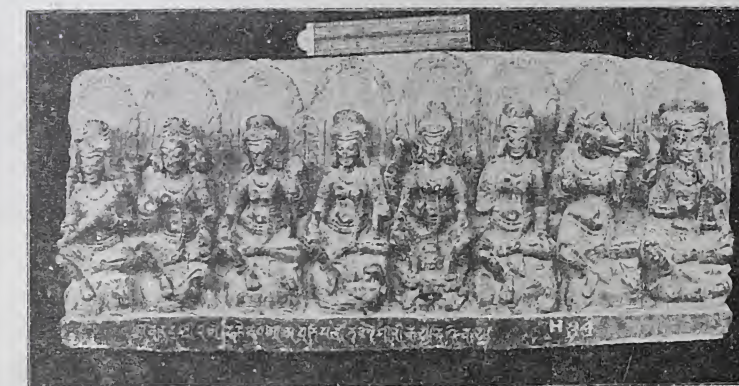
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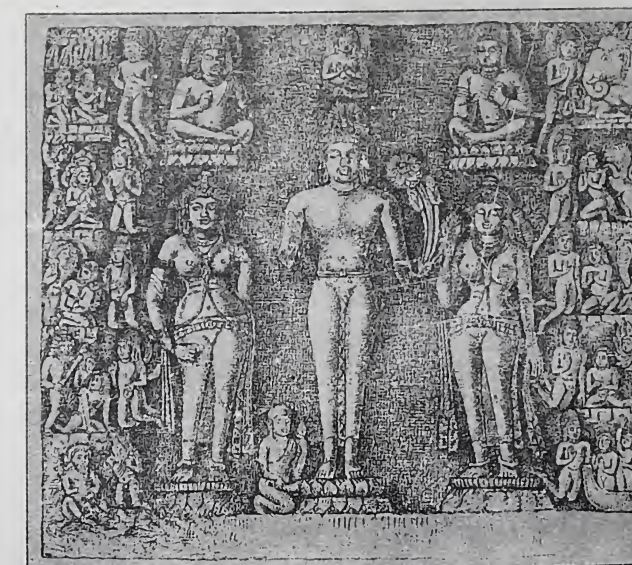
THE ORIGIN AND CULT OF TARA.



a. MATRIKA PANEL AT ELURA.



b. MATRIKA PANEL IN THE LUCKNOW MUSEUM.



c. AVALOKITESVARA AND TARA; BAS-RELIEF FROM KANHERI.



THE ORIGIN AND CULT OF TARĀ.



a. (UTHRAULI, DISTRICT HAZARIBAGH).



b. (INDIAN MUSEUM, CALCUTTA).

REPRESENTATIONS OF TARĀ (STANDING).



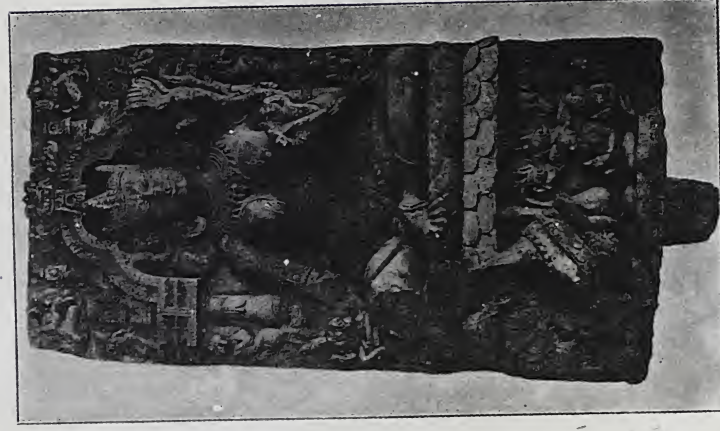
THE ORIGIN AND CULT OF TĀRĀ.



a. (LUCKNOW MUSEUM).



b. (INDIAN MUSEUM, CALCUTTA).

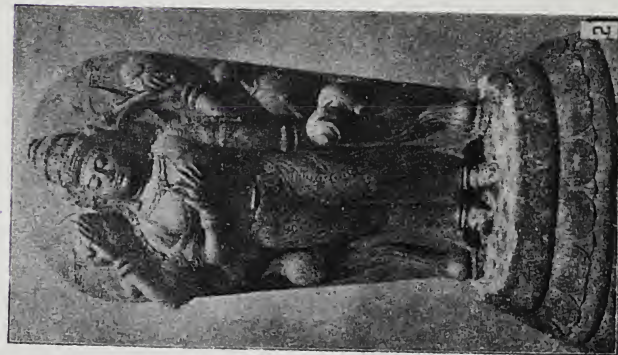


c. (PATNA MUSEUM).

REPRESENTATIONS OF TĀRĀ (SITTING).

Photo-engraved & printed at the Office of the Survey of India, Calcutta, 1904.





a. BRUKUTI-TARĀ FROM CHANDI JAGO  
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b. BRONZE STATUETTE OF MĀRĪCHĪ  
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c. TARĀ FROM JAVA IN THE INDIAN MUSEUM.



d. FOUR BRONZE IMAGES OF TARĀ?



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